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ABSTRACT

Historically less emphasis has been put on the importance of attitude factors than on the skills of reading. When defining attitudes as a person's views, interests, expectations, and so on, attitude toward reading is a combination of all components that contribute to a person's underlying disposition to reading including expectations, interest, appeal of material, and personal satisfaction. One way to group these components is to consider the characteristics of the reader (internal) and the characteristics of the situation (external). If both components can be independently positive or negative then it would be possible to consider the effects of internal or external factors on the reader's skills. Four techniques are available for measuring attitudes: attitude scales, self-reports and interviews, the semantic differential, and the repertory grid. The planning of a reading curriculum can be aided by the use of attitude analysis to learn what should be emphasized in a particular group or among readers generally. This might be especially important if it can be shown, for instance, that readers who have negative attitudes toward internal components and positive attitudes toward external components are poorer readers than those with opposite attitude scores. (TJ)

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ATTITUDE OF PUPILS TO READING

Historically less emphasis has been put on the importance of attitude factors than on the skills of reading, in curriculum planning and classroom practice. This may, in part, be due to the difficulty of defining attitudes and of measuring them.

This paper suggests some of the features of attitude to reading which might be observable and proposes a theoretical model for their implementation in planning the reading curriculum.

The current methods of assessing pupils' attitude to reading are described and summarised.

The present position of curriculum planning in reading is discussed with respect to the importance of attitude factors and some suggestions are given for future development.

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ATTITUDE OF PUPILS TO READING

Introduction

Following a generation or more in which the main emphasis in reading has been on the skills involved, with many attempts being made to identify and classify these component skills in a teaching structure, there is currently an awakening interest in an area of learning often described by the term 'attitude'.

The use of this term has changed markedly over the past 100 years, from a time when attitude may have been meant to indicate simply a physical posture. The more recent terminology refers to something more psychological, perhaps more personal, or intrinsic, but certainly less precise. As the literature on attitude expands, there is an accompanying extension in the meanings and interpretations of the term. Perhaps one of the reasons for the multiplicity of the meanings of the term 'attitude' is related to the many uses and applications it has, not only in psychology, but also in sociology. Some would go as far as to say that the study of attitude is one of the central features of social psychology. In fact many of the assessment techniques used in the assessment of attitude have derived from studies of social groups.

Suffice it to say, in this paper, that 'attitude' is perhaps best viewed as an interdisciplinary term, somehow relating to both psychology and sociology. Most would agree that there are distinct psychological references in attitudes to the extent that they refer to the individual, the way he feels and the way he behaves. Similarly there are sociological references in that an individual's attitude relates to his social world.

What are attitudes?

As has already been suggested, there are many interpretations of the term. An account of some of the meanings attributed to 'attitude', and some of the theories which have been developed to explain the concept, is

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contained in a collection of papers by Warren and Jahoda (1973).

The present discussion starts from a fairly wide definition of attitude in that it refers to a person's views, interests, expectations, awarenesses, judgements etc. Attitude is therefore as closely related to an individual's experience as it is to his perceived needs. In this sense attitude is dynamic rather than static; it has a reference to a person's past, his present and his future. Attitude change has long been recognised as a fundamental issue in human behaviour, both within the individual and in groups.

The extent to which attitude combines cognitive or thinking components, and affective or feeling components is adequately described by Elms (1976). His view that attitude must reflect both components is central to the present discussion. The problem of separating the affective parts from the cognitive parts becomes of particular importance when measures of attitude are being designed. In some ways it would be difficult to state with confidence that the cognitive elements can be measured independently of the affective components. Although some of the measurement techniques described later may lay claim to only one or other of these areas, there remains an element of uncertainty. For example, we may carefully search an individual's views and personal opinions, but we may never be certain that overt responses are an exact duplication of that person's 'private' responses. It is perhaps only the latter that is truly, or nearly, affective and the responses which the individual makes in an assessment situation are the result of a rationalisation (a cognitive process) of privately held feelings.

What is attitude to reading?

At a very basic level this question might be answered very simply in terms of how a pupil (or indeed a teacher or parent) reacts to reading. To do so, however, may imply that reading is a uni-dimensional trait - and that view has little support in the literature. Attitude to reading is

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clearly much more than this. It is a combination of all the components of beliefs, experiences etc. which contribute to the child's or adult's underlying disposition to reading, just as it includes motives and interests which determine the individual's behaviour towards reading.

It may be helpful to try to list just a few of these components.

Some examples of attitude components

- how much the pupil looks forward to reading.
- the extent to which the pupil is prepared to share his reading experiences.
- the child's preferences for types of reading material.
- the pleasure which the child derives from reading.
- how relevant the pupil feels a reading task to be.

Each of these examples may reflect a different aspect of attitude to reading, such as reaction to reading, involvement with reading etc.

The compiling of a list of statements about attitude to reading may only be helpful in indicating that there is, indeed, a range of components involved. In the short list above the attitude components represented may be listed as:-

- expectation
- interaction with others
- interest
- personal satisfaction
- perceived relevance

Each of these five headings can be represented by many other statements besides those originally given. Similarly the list of headings itself can be extended, perhaps indefinitely, and at some stage it becomes necessary to attempt to impose some structure on what is meant by attitude to reading.

The following suggested process of achieving this is only one of many alternatives. It is essential to start off by deciding upon a number of

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statements, each of which appears to relate to attitude to reading. The statements need not be consistent in form nor in their level of generality provided they do appear to relate to attitudes. The statements may be collected from teachers, parents or children themselves. The next stage is to categorise the attitude statements under general headings (e.g. pupil expectations, interests etc.). The number of such headings may be as large as the number of statements. This is a possibility which only serves to highlight the wide range of components which comprise attitudes. The list of headings or categories may itself now be extended without necessarily writing any further attitude statements. A further analysis of this list of categories may suggest a more general or broad grouping of the attitude components.

Some attempts have already been made at such a grouping, though not necessarily by the mechanism suggested here. One such attempt has been by Mathewson (1976) who proposes an Acceptance Model with motivational, attentional, comprehension and acceptance components along with what he terms a relevant attitude component. In this last component, Mathewson adopts a fairly narrow definition of attitude which excludes motivation and action. Thus a child who has a favourable attitude towards books may not necessarily be driven to read them. Though a fairly complex one, the Mathewson model may be very helpful in understanding the dynamic processes which operate within the individual.

A somewhat simpler model relates only two basic components, characteristics of the reader (or individual) and characteristics of the situation. A fuller explanation of this model is given elsewhere (Ewing, in press). The basis of this two factor model is

- a) all attitude components may be categorised as predominantly relating either to the individual or to the situation in which the individual finds himself. The interaction between the two is itself an important consideration, of which more will be said later.

- b) each attitude component has an effect which can be either positive or negative.

The two factors, reader (or individual) and situational, in most instances are easy to identify, as the following examples show,

- the pleasure the child derives from reading
- the amount of curiosity the child shows over reading material
- the extent to which the child feels satisfied on completing a reading task.

Each of these is predominantly a reader factor in that the essential component is intrinsic to the reader. The other factor, comprising situational components can be identified in the following examples,

- how well the pupil relates to his teacher during a reading task
- the appeal of the reading material (e.g. coloured illustrations)
- the expectations which the teacher has for an individual reader.

In each of these last examples the focus of the influencing factor is external to the reader whereas in the individual factors, the focus is internal.

In some instances, it will be difficult to separate the internal factors from the external factors, as they are inter-dependent, and the best that may be achieved is an indication of predominance. To illustrate the two types of factors, consider the early stages of the primary school when children are being taught reading. There are various situational factors which will contribute to the pupil's attitude to reading, such as

- the relationship of the child with the teacher
- the attractiveness of the reading material
- the degree of support offered by the teacher
- the relationship between reading instruction and other classroom activities.

etc.

Each of these is external to the reader and yet each can have an effect,

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from positive to negative, on the child's disposition to reading. Examples of some of the more obviously internal factors in this situation are,

- the child's pre-conception of what reading is
- the extent to which the child wants to read
- the willingness of the child to respond in a learning situation
- the extent to which the child considers himself successful in reading.

etc.

As with the situational factors, each of the internal or reader factors can have a positive or negative influence on the child's overall attitude to reading.

Perhaps a major issue at this stage is to consider how the identification of two types of attitude factors can be helpful in evaluating the total pupil/situational influence on attitudes. The techniques for assessing attitudes is discussed in the following section, but it is important at this point to consider the interpretation of any findings. If it is accepted that both groups of attitude factors can be either positive or negative in terms of ultimate reading performance, then it should be possible to consider the cumulative effect of positive (or negative) factors. Further, it may be helpful to compare the situational factors with the personal factors. In this way, if the cumulative effect of both the reader and the situational factors appears to be positive, then the pupil is likely to achieve well in reading. If both groups of factors are predominantly negative, the reader might be expected to experience some difficulty in achieving. A diagrammatic representation is given below and is more fully explained elsewhere (Ewing, in press).



The areas where the reader factors are mainly positive yet the situational factors remain largely negative (B in the diagram above) and the converse areas where situational factors are mainly positive with negative pupil factors (C in the diagram) remain somewhat of a dilemma. If these two areas can be identified independently, it is not yet known if they will correspond to two groups of children who have different levels of reading performance. Does the child in area B in the diagram above perform generally better than a child in area C, does he perform more poorly or is there no discernible difference? The answers to this question can have major implications in terms of planning the reading curriculum, and this will be discussed again later.

Measuring children's attitudes to reading.

Having decided, albeit in rather general terms, the components which comprise pupils' attitudes to reading, the next major step is to consider how to assess them. There are several recognised techniques for measuring attitudes, each of which can, more or less, be applied to the field of reading. The most widely used techniques are,

1. attitude scales
2. self-report and interviews

3. semantic differential^{9.}
4. repertory grid

Attitude scales.

These are probably the most widely used in reading even though no British scale is currently available on the market. The attitude scale is broadly of two types - a Thurstone scale or a Lickert scale. The former of these requires the pupil to select from a presented list of statements, a specified number with which he personally agrees most. Some sample statements might be,

- a. Reading is boring
- b. It is important to be able to read
- c. Books are exciting
- d. Most things are more fun than reading
- e. Reading homework is unnecessary.

In a Thurstone-type scale, there are typically twenty to thirty such statements, each of which has been previously judged by an independent sample of informed persons to reflect a position along a scale ranging from good attitude to reading to poor attitude to reading.



In this way each of the statements has an 'attitude value' and the sum total of the values of the chosen items is a measure of the child's attitude. The items presented to the pupil must reflect, of course, both ends of the attitude scale and in equal proportions, and typically many items are rejected in course of preparing such a measure.

The Lickert-type scale is easier to construct in that it requires again a series of statements about reading, but this time the pupil is required to indicate the extent of his agreement or disagreement with each.

For example:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. The more pictures a book has the better it is.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. There is too much reading in school.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. I like reading aloud to my teacher.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

There will again be twenty to thirty items in the Lickert-type scale. A value of five is assigned to 'strongly agree' responses of positive items and a value of one to 'strongly disagree' responses of positive items (some prefer to assign values of +2, +1, 0, -1, -2 rather than 5, 4, 3, 2, 1). The converse, of course, applies for negative items. As with the Thurstone-type of scale there will be a balance of positive and negative items in the total scale. The measure of the reader's attitude is then the sum of all the assigned values corresponding to his replies.

There have been a number of Thurstone and Lickert-type scales produced in Britain and they are described by Pumfrey (1976) but none is commercially available or widely used. There are also a number of American scales, the most reported one being that by Estes (1971). A major disadvantage of the existing scales is that each has a somewhat restricted age range.

Self-report and interviews.

There are fewer examples of this type of measurement relating to attitude measurement in reading. One attempt has been made to assess attitude to reading failure (Ewing, 1977). In that study pupils who had serious reading difficulties were asked their views and opinions about a range of topics such as,

How much do you enjoy reading at school?

Do you think people need to be able to read at home?

etc.

The major problem with this type of measure is the very high degree of subjectivity. Nevertheless it is possible to document, in fairly broad categories, how pupils feel about various aspects of reading, although the difficulty in relating responses to one question or group of questions, with another, remains. As a technique, however, it has a high degree of 'face validity' in that the items or questions most obviously relate to the topic of reading. This in itself can give rise to false responses under certain circumstances.

Semantic differential.

This approach proposed by Osgood et al (1957) is based on the pupil rating a statement or concept on several factors. The three major factors suggested by Osgood are an evaluation factor (where the rating represents something good or bad), an activity factor (where the statement is rated as active or passive) and a potency factor (where the rating is on the basis of strong or weak). An example of a semantic differential applied to reading would be,

When I'm reading this is how I feel.	nice	-	awful	(evaluative)
	fast	-	slow	(activity)
	old	-	young	(potency)
This is the kind of people I like to read about.	nice	-	awful	
	fast	-	slow	
	old	-	young	

In practice, a semantic differential technique employs at least three measures for each of the factors, and often four measures, each consisting of paired adjectives. Thus the judgement of any statement may be made on as many as twelve scales, and this, Osgood suggests, is more informative than a judgement on a single scale. An individual's ratings on twelve scales presents a more complete picture of his attitudes than does a single rating. A further advantage of the twelve measures, which may appear to bear little surface relationship to the concept being rated, and

this is an essential point of the semantic differential, is that the same set of measures can be used to rate a range of concepts or statements. In this way it is possible to make direct comparisons among an individual's attitudes to widely differing concepts.

At the present there are few references in the literature to the use of the semantic differential in assessing attitude to reading, and there appear to be no available measures in Britain. The author is currently engaged in applying the technique in the assessment of the attitudes of children from age 8 years to age 15 years to a variety of aspects of reading.

Repertory grid.

The technique known as the repertory grid has been developed by Kelly (1955) as a part of his theory of personal constructs.

The repertory grid technique attempts to examine the way in which an individual interprets his own world. This is done by first identifying several elements about the person's world. For example in reading the elements might be a variety of statements about reading such as have already been described or indeed they might be pictures or illustrations of different reading situations. A sample of children is then asked to take any three of the statements or illustrations and indicate two which are alike in some way, with the third one different. The way in which a child sees two situations as being alike and a third different is known as a construct of that child's real world. By considering different groups of three situations and by asking different children, a range of constructs can be produced.

	reading to the teacher	choosing a book from the library	reading for project work	being read to by mother
it is good fun				
it takes too long				
it is valuable				
you can please yourself				

The use of the repertory grid technique then becomes a matter of getting children to 'check-off' whether or not a reading situation can be regarded one way or another in terms of the construct. Its application to the assessment of attitude to reading is not yet widespread, but may have potential as a research technique.

Implications for the reading curriculum.

Much of the planning of the reading curriculum, over the past few decades, has focussed on the teaching and practice of reading skills. This trend has been closely linked with many attempts to identify the various components of reading as skills and sub-skills. These elements of the reading process are frequently arrayed in a hierarchical order ranging from major skills through to sub-skills.

The attempts to represent reading as comprising component skills, with the attendant implication that such components can be identified discretely and then taught independently is widespread. Thus the SRA Reading Checklist (Larsen et al, 1966) functions on the belief that not only can reading be sub-divided into a large number of factors, but further that they exist in separate categories, cognitive, intellectual, linguistic, social, etc. The planning of a reading curriculum on this basis leads to a fragmentation of the reading process to a degree which may challenge reality.

In the area of reading comprehension, Barrett (see Clymer, T. 1968) has suggested /-

that there are several separate sub-skills arranged according to five skill categories. Support for this approach to reading comprehension has gained considerable ground in Britain over the past ten years and many schools are attempting to implement a planned approach to teaching the individual skills in a systematic way. More recent evidence (Lunzer and Gardner, in press) suggests that reading comprehension is a unitary competence and that the discrete skills suggested by Barrett cannot be identified in practice.

It may be that, as is so often the case in education, the tide is turning against an analysis of reading into many component factors and skills in favour of a consideration of something more general, something which underlies all the proposed components of reading. Such a change has far reaching implications for curriculum planning. If the teaching of reading across the curriculum is not to be based on a hierarchy of functional categories, both at the early instructional level and at the later reading extension and development level, what is to take its place? It is unlikely that a major shift in curriculum planning will take place even within a few years, but if change is to come, it may begin to focus more on the individual, the reader, rather than on the reading situation or reading task.

The simple model suggested earlier, where reading situation factors are compared with reader or personal factors may provide some direction for future development. If pupils who have predominantly positive reader factors and negative situational factors (category B in the model) turn out to be more successful readers than pupils who have mainly positive situational factors with negative reader factors (category C in the model), this may suggest that reader factors are stronger determinants of reading success than situational factors. For the reading curriculum, and indeed for classroom practice, this may mean that greater attention must be given to pupil interests, pupil perceptions, willingness and motivation.

perhaps a new emphasis might be placed on the considerations which relate to children's attitude. This does not mean that curriculum planning must have regard to the personal qualities of each child, but rather that it may focus on these general aspects of education which are related to positive attitude formation. It means therefore that the school may wish to improve conditions or to create situations where the child's curiosity may be aroused and his motivation stimulated, perhaps with specific reference to teaching objectives in reading and other areas of the school curriculum.

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